

Weekly Musings + January 3, 2011



Early depiction of the Magi from the 4th century--note the Phrygian hat from the province of Phrygia in Asia Minor and often associated with one of the mystery religions that competed with early Christianity--Mythrianism.

One of the most interesting books I have recently bought but not yet read is called "Revelation of the Magi" by Brent Landau. Landau, who happens to be Episcopal, wrote his Ph.D. at Harvard University on a hitherto unknown document from the Vatican library that claims to be the writings of the so called wise men or magi (magi). The document is written in Syriac (a language similar to Aramaic, the language of Jesus, and also the language on many coins I collect) and written in the eighth century. The document claims the wise men came from China (the land of silk) and that there were 12 of them. The biblical account from Matthew's gospel does not give us their number or their names. Their commonly accepted number (three) dates to the third century and a theologian called Origen.

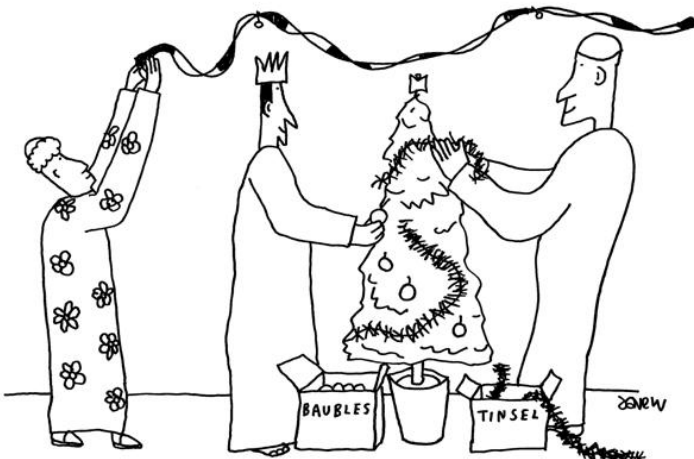
Their names, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar are later still. Their putative relics were stolen from Constantinople in the 4th century and brought to Milan in Italy. Later on they were stolen fair and square by Frederick Barbarossa during the crusades and now reside in the glorious Cologne cathedral in Germany which could hold a ten story building in its crossing (the central space of a gothic cathedral which is the middle of the cross shaped floor plan).

Reliquary of the magi at Cologne Cathedral

The wise men mark the beginning of the season of Epiphany. The feast day itself is on Thursday and is a white day but the season is green. Epiphany is the rubber season that can stretch or shrink according to need. Its beginning is fixed on January 6. The day before is of course the last day of Christmas or twelfth night, made famous by Shakespeare's play. It ends the day before Ash Wednesday (March 9) which date varies according to the date of Easter.

Theologically it is a time when we talk about the showing forth (epiphany) of Christ to the Gentiles. More and more we emphasize the baptism of Christ (a long standing Orthodox tradition). Frankly, the spreading of the gospel to gentiles (non Jews) seems a moot point geographically and historically to the modern American Christian.

The Orthodox do house blessings in this season and bless the local river. One Orthodox priest told he that if he was coming for a house blessing the Christmas decorations definitely must be down. With that in mind, I close with Dave Walker's cartoon on same from the Cartoon Church:



EPIPHANY: THE WISE MEN /
TAKING DOWN THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS



Our youth are having a lock-in with the youth of St. James, Bozeman, this weekend. We invite your prayers for our young people. The annual meeting is Sunday, January 16, after the 10 am service. We will elect the wardens, vestry persons and delegates to diocesan convention (held this year at Big Sky, October 7-9). Thanks to all of you who have returned your pledge cards.

The Rev. Canon Gary Waddingham • Rector, St. Luke's Episcopal Church • Regional Canon, Diocese of Montana